

Neil Weicher • 

Committee on Environment
Hartford, CT

February 9, 2009

To the committee members:

I am speaking regarding Raised Bills 6312 and 6313. As I'm sure you know by now, they will limit raw milk to on-farm sales only, and put severe and unnecessary testing and financial burdens on small, family-owned farms.

I have been consuming raw milk and cheese for quite some time. Whatever you think about raw milk – even if the idea is unappealing to you – I think we can all agree that hardworking, responsible, taxpaying adults should have the right to purchase raw milk and cheese for themselves and their families. I am incensed that the Department of Agriculture is trying to take this right away from us for no good purpose.

There is no "health" problem. I have researched this, and in recent memory there has been only one e-coli incident in Connecticut and that was from a non-owner-operated farm. There have been no known incidents with raw milk from owner-operated farms. Other small, raw milk farms around the country have similar sterling track records. Furthermore, the consumption of raw milk is completely voluntary and it is impossible purchase it by accident.

This makes no sense on so many levels: (a) The small farms are hurt. (b) The stores they sell through are hurt. (c) A healthy, natural food that our grandparents drank is removed from the marketplace. (d) Connecticut is deprived of sales tax revenue. (e) Connecticut is deprived of tourist dollars, as people come here from MA and NY to buy raw milk. (f) We are deprived of our freedom of choice for no good reason. In fact, so many parties – including the state government – are hurt by this that you have to wonder who exactly is benefiting from this, and why it is being pushed so hard and so quickly.

In my opinion, this is nothing less than a war on small, family-owned farms, and by extension, all small businesses in Connecticut who face ever increasing expenses and regulations. The only purpose I can see for such legislation is to remove one of the few competitive advantages that small family farms have over industrial dairy processors: Large dairy processors would require expensive changes in equipment and procedures to produce a product safe and clean enough to be consumed unpasteurized.

Far more cases of e-coli and salmonella occur in other foods, including lettuce, tomatoes, spinach, peanut butter, and yes, even pasteurized milk. Yet no government agencies are attempting to limit or outlaw their sale and consumption. Pasteurized milk can easily become contaminated after processing, whereas raw milk is arguably the most accountable food product we can buy because it comes almost exclusively from small, owner-operated farms. This is not tobacco – in fact I can legally buy tobacco anywhere I want. Raw milk is actually healthy, yet this is the food the Department of Agriculture is trying to remove.

These bills will do nothing to increase the safety of the public because, frankly, the public are not at risk. However this could put some of the few remaining dairy farmers out of business. Finally, it will put a financial strain on a number of small businesses at a time when it seems clear that the financial well-being of Connecticut will rely on small business. I can see nothing good coming out of these bills and potentially a lot of harm. I can't imagine that this is the legacy that any of you want to leave for future Connecticut residents. I urge you to reject Raised Bills 6312 and 6313.

Thank you for listening and thank you for your public service.